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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the Learning Center Enrichment Program for elementary school gifted and talented children. The nomenclature associated with the program model (learning center, enrichment, and management system) is defined; and it is explained that the program is organized according to the enrichment triad model advocated by J. Renzulli because it is a systematic plan which emphasizes three types of instructional activities (general exploratory experiences which permit a child to clarify his/her own interests and abilities, group learning activities which develop processes and operations that enable students to deal more effectively with content, and individual or small group investigations of real life problems). Sections address the following program components: philosophy, goals and objectives, the physical facility, standard operating procedures (including timeline, hours, personnel, materials, scheduling, organization, and evaluation), gifted/talented dimension, possible adaptations, mini-center dimension, and guidelines for designing center themes. (SBH)

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# USE A BUILDING LEARNING CENTER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM TO MEET NEEDS OF GIFTED/TALENTED

By Mrs. Sandra Schurr

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USE A BUILDING LEARNING CENTER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM TO
MEET NEEDS OF GIFTED/TALENTED

Approximately 1.5 to 2.5 million children in the United States can be identified as gifted or talented under the U. S. Office of Education definition of giftedness.

Only 4% of these children are currently being served by special programs.

The majority of the gifted child's school adjustment problems occur between kindergarten and fourth grade. Approximately 50% of gifted children become "mental dropouts" at around ten years of age.

Available funding from federal sources for programs for the gifted is being used in less than 15% of states.

NO state provides for all of its gifted. In those states with programs, at best only 50% of the gifted in the state are being served.

Of twenty-one states currently having state legislation providing special resources and incentives to local districts for programming, only ten have state level consultants with even half-time responsibility for the gifted.[1]

Today with statistics and legislative data such as that cited above, educators who find themselves on the bottom line can't help but ask one another a series of "HOW-TO" questions:

HOW can a school begin to identify its gifted/talented population?

HOW can a school make its staff aware of the special needs of its gifted/talented population?

HOW can a school develop an effective program to educate its gifted/talented population?

In an attempt to find answers that were both feasible and realistic, the Learning Center Enrichment Program at Vaughan Elementary School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, was conceived and implemented during the fall of 1976.

The program, now in its third year of operation, has proven to be so successful that modifications and adaptations of it are visible in many other school communities throughout the state of Michigan.

In order to fully understand the many facets of this gifted/talented program, it is necessary to first define the nomenclature associated with the model-----terms such as learning center, enrichment, and management system as they are used in this context.

MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

To begin with, "Gifted education often seems to consist of attractive and exciting enrichment activities designed to "turn on" gifted children and make parents feel that something worthwhile is happening. Rarely do gifted programs have an explicit rationale or theoretical base, much less specific instructional objectives. Yet it seems that if programs for the gifted are to grow and become established in the curriculum, they should be systematically designed and theoretically defensible."[2] For this reason, the Learning Center Enrichment Program combines the best of two nationally recognized Gifted/Talented prototypes including that of Dr. Joseph Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model and the five thinking operations identified by Guilford's Structure of the Intellect.

Specifically, the Learning Center Enrichment Program is organized according to the Enrichment Triad Model advocated by Renzulli because it is a systematic plan which emphasizes three types of instructional activities:

(1) general exploratory experiences which permit a child to clarify his/her own interests and abilities, (2) group learning activities which develop processes and operations that enable student to deal more effectively with content, and (3) individual or small group investigations of real life problems.[3]

Interestingly, the Learning Center Enrichment program goes beyond the perameters defined by the Triad model in that all the Types I and II experiences/activities/tasks developed especially for the Center program are clearly developed and classified according to the five thought processes advocated by the Structure of the Intellect model, namely MEMORY, CONVERGENT PRODUCTION, DIVERGENT PRODUCTION, COGNITION, and EVALUATION.[4] Every time a student completes a Center requirement, he/she is well aware of what cognitive level is indeed the focus. In designing all the Center tasks, therefore, one of the five thought operations is being practiced through application and one finds many more divergent thinking and evaluation tasks than those at the memory or convergent production levels.

ENRICHMENT

Webster's dictionary defines "enrichment" as "to make something richer in quality." In the Learning Center program, enrichment means the student is given an organized and ongoing opportunity to examine subject matter far beyond the routine content stressed in the regular classroom setting. This enrichment is not a hit and miss process, but rather one that provides a multitude of learning opportunities to accommodate a myriad of interests and talents. Within a broad theme or discipline, each student is provided with options and choices so that individualized instruction is a real component. Such a personalized study plan or contract allows the child to develop in-depth interests as they arise, thus enhancing the learning process for the gifted. Differentiated learning is encouraged every step of the way.

LEARNING STATION or CENTER

Ideally, the total community or world environment should be used as the basis for an enrichment curriculum, but this concept is neither possible nor feasible. It is the intent of the learning station in this program, however, to serve as an immediate mini-society or microcosm of the outside community---one that physically houses the various prescriptive activities and materials relevant to that specialized area of study.

Each of the learning stations includes "activities ranging from the concrete to the abstract, simple to the difficult. The activities are sequential in development and every activity sets goals, are self-choice oriented, self motivating, self pacing, and contain at least some aspects of self evaluation".[5] In essence, the learning station set-up is the method used for individualizing or personalizing the instruction to focus the instructional process on each individual student-----his skills, abilities, interests, learning styles, motivation, goals, rate of learning, self-discipline, problem-solving ability, degree of retention, participation, strengths, weaknesses, and prognosis for moving ahead in various curriculum areas and projects. The Center leader or teacher becomes more professional and assumes the functions of learning facilitator, guide, consultant, professional diagnostician and prescriber of learning resources. The process places more responsibility for learning on the students.[6]

All in all, the Learning Center Enrichment Program is a viable way to launch a Gifted/Talented program in any elementary school setting because it is:

1. Based on a clearly defined set of objectives as well as on two nationally acclaimed management systems
2. Economically feasible to implement
3. Administered with current school personnel and can in fact

expand role or job description of media specialist

4. Proven successful with significant group of identified Gifted/Talented students after three years of intensive field testing
5. Adaptable to any set of circumstances or given set of financial/personnel/facility resources

The purpose of this article is ultimately to give the reader specifics on how a Learning Center Enrichment Program can be made possible in any elementary school situation. Without a doubt, a program that services not only the identified Gifted/Talented students in the school population, but also the many other boys and girls who similarly require the additional stimulation or responsibility linked with such an opportunity, cannot help but meet the needs of the times. As Simeon Ramo once said, "Without a good systems analysis and systems design as a first step or at least as a parallel effort it is not easy to describe, understand and specify the pieces of the solution."[7] There is no doubt that one of the challenges in education today is that of programming for our high-potential young people and the Learning Center Enrichment Program is one workable methodology for solving that quandary. TRY IT, YOU'LL LIKE IT . . AND SO WILL THE KIDS!

PHILOSOPHY OF LEARNING CENTER PROGRAM

The underlying philosophy of the Learning Center program can best be summed up in the following seven quotations because they emphasize the basic premises and learning theories which make up the tasks and projects taught at the center.

"OBSERVATION MORE THAN BOOKS, EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN TEACHERS ARE THE PRIME EDUCATORS." By A. B. Alcott.

The activities presented at the Center are very student-centered and

activity oriented. Learning by doing is indeed the key.

"EDUCATION CONSISTS OF POUNDING ABSTRACT IDEAS INTO CONCRETE HEADS." by Voltaire.

Complex subjects, such as economics, nutrition, energy sources, are taught at the Center by presenting them in very relevant, meaningful ways to the students. This is accomplished, in large part, through the use of manipulative aids, concrete experiences or models, and active exploration in the students' immediate environment or community.

"THE AIM OF EDUCATION SHOULD BE TO TEACH THE CHILD TO THINK, NOT WHAT TO THINK." by John Dewey.

Knowledge acquired via the thought operations identified by Mary Meeker's Structure of the Intellect are emphasized consistently when setting up Center tasks and projects. All activities the students are involved in at the Center reflect the five thinking operations-----Memory, Convergent Production, Divergent Production, Cognition, and Evaluation.

"THE OBJECT OF TEACHING A CHILD IS TO ENABLE HIM TO GET ALONG WITHOUT A TEACHER." by L. B. Johnson

Independence is fostered and the role of the Center Leader as a facilitator is encouraged. It is critical that the instruction take place in such a way that the Center Leader acts as a guide on the side and not a sage on the stage.

"HE WHO LEARNS BY FINDING OUT HAS SEVEN FOLD THE SKILL OF HIM WHO LEARNS BY BEING TOLD." by A. Guiterman.

The Learning Center Enrichment Program places a great deal of the responsibility for learning on the student and makes good use of his individual interests, goals, and strengths. It is important that the child is never told more than he wants to know in any given situation so that the genuine discovery

of knowledge becomes the meaningful experience it is intended to be.

"THE THREE R's OF OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM MUST BE SUPPORTED BY THE THREE T'S:

TEACHERS WHO ARE SUPERIOR . . .

TECHNIQUES THAT ARE MODERN . . .

THINKING ABOUT EDUCATION WHICH PLACES IT FIRST IN ALL OUR HOPES, PLANS, DECISIONS." by E. Hubbard.

Providing students with options, unusual activities, and alternative classroom settings as well as with varied teacher personalities makes the Center program a challenging one for most students.

"EVERY CITIZEN OF THIS COUNTRY, WHETHER HE POUNDS NAILS, RAISES CORN, DESIGNS ROCKETS, OR WRITES POETRY, SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO KNOW AND LOVE HIS AMERICAN HERITAGE; TO USE THE LANGUAGE WELL; TO UNDERSTAND THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE, AND TO ENJOY THE ARTS. THE DOLLARS HE GAINS IN THE ABSENCE OF ENLIGHTENMENT LIKE THIS WILL BE EARNED IN DRUDGERY AND SPENT IN IGNORANCE." by C. E. Gross.

Integration of the disciplines underlies all Center activities so that each Center theme includes social studies, language arts, science, math, art, and music or physical education wherever and whenever possible.[8]

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF CENTER PROGRAM

1. Encourage optimum use of the Media Center facility including resources, physical plant, and materials.
2. Make optimum use of skills/talents/expertise of the Media Center personnel.
3. Actively involve principal in curriculum development and curriculum materials to enhance the instructional program of the building.
4. Provide model for possible alternative methods of instruction and materials to staff for possible application or modification.

5. Provide ongoing model of enrichment program for gifted/talented population who require academic challenges beyond the regular classroom program.
6. Provide re-inforcement of skills/content areas learned in regular classroom setting.
7. Provide alternative learning opportunities for students with special education needs or requirements.
8. Field test new materials, strategies, trends, and programs in an informal setting.

DESCRIPTION OF PHYSICAL FACILITY REQUIRED FOR LEARNING CENTER

Section of library or media center approximately eighteen feet by eighteen feet.

Minimum of four study carrels or tables to serve as individual stations.

Minimum of four large screen dividers or easels for display purposes.

Minimum of 25 lap boards made of masonite in size eighteen inches by thirty inches.

Supply cabinet or tote-tray storage unit for housing/storing teaching materials and supplies.

File boxes for housing student folders, preferably one box for each classroom teacher.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR BASIC LEARNING CENTER PROGRAM

TIMELINE: Operate four Centers per year, each developed around a central theme. Center is open for a six week period. Allow a two week period for setting up one Center and taking down another.

HOURS: Center open five days a week from 9:00 to 3:00. Also open during recess periods and students sign up in advance on first come, first serve basis.

PERSONNEL: Adult operates/supervises Center at all times. Personnel used to work Center includes parent volunteers, principal, teacher aide/paraprofessional, media center specialist, and student volunteers (high school students or upper-grade students). A minimum of two Center Leaders should service Center at all times, especially at high-attendance times.

MATERIALS: Basically, Center has two sets of materials-----one geared to grades K-3 and the other geared to grades 4-6. These are color coded to distinguish one set from the other. The format for presenting tasks/projects/activities to students takes one of two forms-----Activity Cards or File Folders. Each card or folder always includes:

1. Title of Activity
2. Specific Operation/Talent/Cognitive Level Featured
3. Statement of Purpose or Objective(s) To Be Learned
4. Time Required To Complete Task
5. Materials/Resources Needed
6. Set of Directions/INFORMATION
7. Evaluation (Record or Feedback Sheet)

Also, as part of the Directions Section, one should find explanations for three different levels/tasks/requirements of varying difficulty so as to better individualize the curriculum for the different grade levels represented in the cluster. For the most part, materials are prepared by the teacher/center leader although many commercial materials are incorporated. Hopefully, wherever possible, the students should be able to have options in the selection of activities to complete.

SCHEDULING: A majority of the time, students participate in the Learning Center program by choice. The only exception to this are specified time slots-----two forty-five minute periods a week -----set aside for clustering the gifted and talented boys and girls. They are scheduled in one or more of the following ways:

a. Self-scheduling during recess periods only
b. Release time from classroom upon completion of classroom work and is done on random basis
c. Pre-arranged time between Center Leader and classroom teacher
d. Daily or weekly schedule set up by classroom teacher and/or Center Leader
e. Requirement by classroom teacher because of special interest/need/aptitude on part of student

ORGANIZATION: Every Center is a complete teaching unit having five basic requirements/projects/activities to be met, each focusing on a key concept. In designing the five requirements, a sincere attempt is made to stress a variety of creative/critical thinking skills structured through the following curriculum models-----STRUCTURE OF THE INTELLECT and RENZULLI'S TRIAD MODEL.

Students who complete all five requirements are entitled to a special reward or bonus at the end as well as an evaluation and certificate of merit. Each Center is introduced to all students in the building the first week of its operation.

This is accomplished through a scheduled half hour orientation session in the Media Center with each classroom and teacher. The child has about a week to make up his/her mind on whether to join the Center or not. It is stressed that every Center is NOT for every student. Once a child decides to participate, he/she obtains a requirement sheet, fills it out, and signs up for an introductory group session. At this opening session, the Center Leader does a motivating, directed teaching activity to set the tone for the Center itself. This Introductory Group session serves as the first requirement and usually has a follow-up worksheet or record sheet to complete. The remaining four requirements provide students with some options. In essence, sets of folders or activity cards are placed at the four stations and each set is geared around a specific concept/skill. As child completes a requirement, it must be approved by a Center Leader. Quality control is an integral part of all Center work.

EVALUATION: All students who participate in the Center receive a special Certificate for doing so. In addition, an evaluation of their work is given to the classroom teacher who in turn uses it as input for parent conferences, report cards, or general classroom assessment. These certificates and evaluations are color coded so that each Center has a different color enabling the student to collect four that are alike and yet different.

OVERVIEW OF GIFTED/TALENTED DIMENSION TO LEARNING CENTER PROGRAM

WHO: Identified Gifted/Talented Students in Grades 1-6 based on one or more of following criteria:

I.Q. Scores of 132 or higher

Achievement Test Scores of 99%ile

Parent Surveys

Peer Identification or Sociograms

Teacher Judgment

Renzulli Checklists

Torrence Test of Creativity

WHAT: Are clustered in Center by groups twice a week with grades 1-3 meeting together and grades 4-6 meeting together. Center is closed to general population during these periods and two Center Leaders are available to work exclusively with this group of students.

WHEN: Grades 1-3 meet twice a week for two forty/five minute periods

Wednesdays - 12:15-1:00

Fridays - 9:30-10:15

Grades 4-6 meet twice a week for two forty/five minute periods

Mondays - 10:30-11:15

Tuesdays - 11:30-12:15

WHERE: Learning Center section of School Library

WHY: To give identified students a special opportunity to interact exclusively with one another and to receive individual guidance/ instruction from Center Leaders on a teacher/pupil ratio of 1:5.

HOW: All Gifted/Talented students complete three out of five regular Center requirements as initially developed for all participating students. This includes opening group activity and any two of remaining four options. Center Leaders then develop remaining two requirements for <u>each</u> of the G/T students based on:

1. Student aptitudes/interests based on SRA Interest Inventory
2. Special Activities based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Development
3. Special Final Project developed mutually with student through individual conferences on need basis

POSSIBLE ADAPTATIONS OF LEARNING CENTER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

The Learning Center Enrichment Program as outlined in this basic How-To Manual can be modified to meet a wide variety of school budgets/personnel/facility limitations as well as student needs. It is recommended that one of the following options be considered in implementing a similar program.

1. Make Learning Center available for special groups of students only. This might include: Gifted/Talented, Primary, or Upper Elementary students.
2. Open Learning Center for limited periods of time as opposed to all day, every day. This might include: Three days a week; Half days a week; Every other marking period; Combination of these.
3. Limit Learning Center activities/choices to the Mini-Center component only.
4. Limit number of Center options to single theme with single set of tasks or requirements.
5. Introduce Learning Center concept to individual classrooms only. Regular classroom teachers set up single Center for students to teach a specific unit in Social Studies/Science or as an enrichment experience for Gifted/Talented population. Learning Center might become project of team teaching situation shared by staff servicing same grade levels or by core of parent volunteers.

THE MINI-CENTER DIMENSION TO PROGRAM

Mini-surprise centers might be the first step in launching a learning center program. As you will see they are adaptable to suit individual building needs.

In an existing program, such as ours, these centers are designed to attract the student who is not able to make the time commitment necessary in the long-range centers.

Each center is based on a central theme, and contains three distinct, success-oriented activities. The activities are planned so (in most cases) each one can be completed in a single visit of a half hour to the Media Center. When necessary, the activities are color-coded to denote primary and upper elementary levels although many of them are designed so simply that they can be used for either one.

This type of Center has numerous applications. The only limiting factor is one's imagination. For instance, within the Media Center they can be designed to aid in teaching library use; they can be based on a single library title (one that sits on the shelf or a very popular title); they can be extensions of the classroom curriculum (metric fun or tangram geometry); or they may be open-ended, challenging activities designed to appeal to the creative or gifted students.

Components for construction of these mini-centers include:

Cardboard carrel or large three-sided box

Backing material such as contact paper or wrapping paper

Display material such as cut-out figures or letters

Activities as self-directing and simply stated as possible

Support materials necessary to complete activities such as worksheets, resource books, or ruler

A record-keeping system is important in order to provide feedback on student performance.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNING CENTER THEMES

EVERY SET OF ACTIVITIES IN A GIVEN CENTER SHOULD CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING:

1. Set of goals or objectives to be achieved after completing the unit.
2. Development of vocabulary unique to the unit theme.
3. Utility of available materials and equipment easily accessible to students for individual and independent use.
4. Motivational graphics or titles for activities and requirements.
5. Varied learning activities/tasks including projects, surveys, interviews, discussions, construction of art or audio-visual aids, reports, short talks, research, or experiments.
6. Culminating activities that involve sharing of work results with rest of school.
7. Evaluation techniques including written tests, demonstrations, or construction of projects.

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA TO CONSIDER AFTER DEVELOPING CENTER THEME AND RELATED ACTIVITIES:

1. Does the unit emphasize the basic skills as well as information important in the content area?
2. Are the students actively involved in the learning process?
3. Do the learning activities require the development of critical thinking and creative thinking skills?
4. Does the program or project fit the developmental level of the child?
5. Does the unit contain a variety of materials which appear to interest the child?

6. Does the unit contain a variety of activities/tasks which appear to interest the child?

7. Have you included a variety of evaluative techniques?

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